



CITY OF HOUSTON

Library Department

Interoffice

Correspondence

To: Walter Hambrick, Mayor's Office
Deputy Chief of Staff

From: Rhea B. Lawson, Ph.D.
Library Director

Date: August 10, 2022

CC:

Subject: Feedings and the Problems
they cause continue unabated

As HPL's Fall Special Events season at the Julia Ideson Building is about to pick up, I wanted to make sure that you were aware of the ongoing feedings on McKinney and the issues they have continued to cause.

The frequency of the feedings has become daily by Food Not Bombs on the corner of McKinney and Smith. In recent weeks the problems associated with these feedings have escalated.

- Obstruction - Blocking both courtyard entrances to the Julia Ideson, including the wheelchair ramp, which FNB uses as a service counter for distribution and consumption of the food. Despite repeated requests for them not to block this ADA access, they refuse. On multiple occasions recently, they have backed their trucks up onto the sidewalk and refused to move them.
- Destruction of property – The Parks Dept has explained that the bricks and tiles that the people attending these feedings keep ripping out of the hardscape to hold their places in line, and often breaking, are no longer being produced, thus cannot be replaced. Signage has been damaged. Plants and flowerbeds are routinely trampled and used for urination and defecation.
- Trash – Everyday, HPL staff finds large amounts of trash that is left around the perimeter of the JIB and often tossed inside of the courtyard. Before every event, our staff has to walk the perimeter and courtyards to pick up the to-go boxes, plasticware, leftovers, and food wrappers that litter the space. The trash is very noticeable for prospective clients who come to view the JIB (and usually asked about).
- Safety – The clients of Food Not Bombs have become increasingly violent. Recently, one sat atop the plaza gate wall and yelled threats to staff as they were trying to exit to walk to their cars at Tranquility, threatening to shoot them and cleanse the world of their sins. These types of outburst are not uncommon, and scare our staff, our clients and their guests.
- Alarming, at the end of June, one of the clients of Food Not Bombs began hurling the aforementioned bricks at cars passing by on McKinney. Several cars were damaged, including one belonging to HPL staff. The documented PITS descriptions from those attacks follow:

- "At 5:20pm Chatrice Lange leaving the parking garage Central Library going down McKinney to make a right on Smith and coming to the red light an gentlemen pick up rocks and starts to hit the car. One rock hit the passenger side front window shattering it and glass went everywhere inside the car and another rock hit the same side and put an dent on passenger door. Ms. Lange continue to drive and turned right on Smith and stopped. Immediately looking back to make sure she was safe she witness the same guy throwing another rock and hitting another white car. While on the phone with dispatcher he ask her if she can still see the guy and she told him yes by that time he was throwing rocks at a person that was sitting near bus stop and she started to throw them back. By this time police arrived and Ms. Lange drove around to meet them where they was and the guy was still throwing rocks. Police arrested the guy immediately and started asking questions and ask if she wanted to press charges and she said yes along with the other victim. Police said they DA will be in touch to follow up on the case.
- "After leaving the Central Library parking garage, Jason Stephens was in the right lane to turn from McKinney Street onto Smith Street when a man began throwing bricks at vehicles. The man threw two bricks at the vehicle preceding Jason Stephens and Jason Stephens shifted into another lane and kept driving. While looking in the rearview mirror, Jason Stephens noticed the man picking up another brick and throwing it at another vehicle. The man is assumed to be homeless and was congregating around the area where the daily feedings take place.

Jason Stephens called 911 and filed a report as he was driving and requested immediate police action. Jason Stephens then called Assistant Director John Middleton at 5:15pm to notify him of the issue and subsequently called HPL Security at 5:17pm to notify the guards on the Library Plaza to help redirect staff that might be walking to catch a bus to keep them from getting attacked or injured. HPL Security contacted Jason Stephens back at 5:24pm to let him know the perpetrator was apprehended and two of the drivers that sustained damage to their vehicles were on site talking to HPD."

There are now 2-3 groups that have decided that our block is where to distribute food. There is one group that does it once a month on Fridays, but they are across the street in Hermann Square and actually stay to pick up some of the trash produced by their distribution. The more concerning are the daily distributions by Food Not Bombs which does not pick up their trash and another group who infrequently stops at the plaza to distribute beverages.

The damages to the property and landscaping at the JIB continues. The Parks Department has recently contracted supplemental landscaping services, funded with HPL's Special Events rental revenues, to deal with the onslaught of trash, human waste, and damages to landscape. These tens of thousands of dollars should be spent, as intended, on enhancing the facility, not on covering the costs of the negative impacts of these feedings by FNB.

These feedings continue to negatively impact HPL's service to the public, the safety of COH employees and customers, the maintenance of the JIB and its grounds, and the reputation of the JIB as one of the COH's premiere event venues.

Our staff is exhausted and demoralized by the never-ending problems that they have to deal with on a daily basis, and have had to deal with for years. They are embarrassed when having to explain these issues to customers and events clients, and they are increasingly upset that they are left on the front lines dealing with the threats, insults, garbage, filth, and danger resulting from these feedings without resolution.